



# U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

## Tonga

### International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 288 square miles, and its population is approximately 112,400. According to the last official census (1996), membership by percentage of population of major denominations is: Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, 41 percent; Roman Catholic, 16 percent; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 14 percent; Free Church of Tonga, 12 percent, and; others, 17 percent. However, both Roman Catholics and Mormons state that the number of adherents is higher than reported. Members of the Tokaikolo Church (a local offshoot of the Methodist Church), Seventh-day Adventists, Assemblies of God, Anglicans, the Baha'i Faith, Islam, and Hinduism are present in much smaller numbers. There is no resident Jewish community. There were no reports of atheists.

Western missionaries, particularly Mormons and other Christian denominations, were active in the country.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strived to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no state religion. Registration of religious groups is recommended by the Government for tax purposes, but it is not required. All religious groups are permitted duty-free entry of goods intended for religious purposes, but no religious group is subsidized or granted tax-exempt status.

Missionaries operated without special restrictions. There were a number of schools operated by Mormons and by the Wesleyan Church.

Good Friday, Easter Monday, Christmas Day, and Boxing Day are official holidays.

##### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

The Constitution states that Sunday, the Sabbath day, is to be "kept holy" and that no business can be conducted "except according to law." Although an exception is made for hotels and resorts that are part of the tourism industry, the Sabbath day business prohibition is enforced strictly for all businesses, regardless of the business owners' religion.

The Tonga Broadcasting Commission (TBC) maintained policy guidelines regarding the broadcast of religious programming on Radio Tonga. The TBC guidelines stated that in view of "the character of the listening public," those who preach on Radio Tonga

must confine their preaching "within the limits of the mainstream Christian tradition." Although religious leaders from all religions were permitted to host programs, due to this policy, the TBC did not allow members of the Baha'i Faith to discuss the tenets of their religion, or the founder, Baha'u'llah, by name. Similarly, the TBC did not allow Mormons to discuss their founder, Joseph Smith, or the Book of Mormon by name. This policy applied to all churches. Mormons use Radio Tonga for the announcement of church activities and functions. Other faiths also utilize Radio Tonga. Members of the Baha'i Faith use a privately owned radio station for program activities and the announcement of functions. A government-owned newspaper occasionally carried news articles about Baha'i activities or events, as well as about those of other faiths.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### ***Forced Religious Conversion***

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

#### **Abuses by Terrorist Organizations**

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

#### **Section III. Societal Attitudes**

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

#### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

The U.S. Government does not maintain an Embassy in the country; the U.S. Ambassador in Suva, Fiji, was accredited to the Government in Nuku'alofa. The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Officials from the U.S. Embassy in Fiji met with religious officials and nongovernmental organizations during visits to the country.

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[International Religious Freedom Report Home Page](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51532.htm)